

SAM SHAW SINGS THE 'PARIS BLUES'

By HERBERT MITGANG

OVER the past dozen years or so, one of the credit lines appearing quite regularly below some of the more dramatic stills on this page has read: Sam Shaw. This modest little type is reserved for those movie craftsmen, called still photographers, who go out on location with a picture while it is being shot in motion and do their own shooting with regular hand cameras for publication needs. Such photographers as Glen Miller, Phil Stern and Sam Shaw are respected as professionals in their own right, who can stop action artistically, hide a wrinkle or highlight a chest.

Once in a long while, people behind the scenes crash through the creative barrier to show up on the screen with the fancy credits. The first still photographer in Hollywood's recent history who has leaped in one step to producer of a major film is Sam Shaw. Or, rather, Sam Shaw, for his agate-sized name may now be increased to the

in his mind until he discussed the idea with an old friend, Duke Ellington. The Duke reminisced fondly on Paris and its meaning: freedom to play and compose in a romantic atmosphere where the first consideration was artistry.

"A story began to take shape after the ideas were discussed with Harold Flender," Shaw recalled. "He wrote a realistic novel called 'Paris Blues' about musicians playing and balling it up in Paris. Now there was a story in existence with real characters. That was about four years ago, and then the tough job began of trying to convince a movie company that there was a big audience waiting for an honest jazz film in which a Negro musician and other American expatriates figured prominently."

Broken Rhythm

Most of the major companies as well as the minors respected the story but figured it was both tough and controversial. Shaw kept working on its de-

All the while, Shaw was on the road with other people's pictures, shooting stills. He was in California for the long months it took his friend, Marlon Brando, to direct "One-Eyed Jacks." As time passed and Paramount executives chewed their nails while Brando waited for the Pacific waves to break artistically, the late Jack Harrison of the Hollywood Reporter got off one of his pungent observations.

"The real reason Brando's taking so long," he said, "is that Sam's got all the cameras rigged to shoot background footage for 'Paris Blues.'"

Last winter and spring, the five-years-in-the-making pic-

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is Sam Shaw. Or, rather, Sam Shaw, for his agate-sized name may now be increased to the calculably larger news type—with appropriate cymbals and fanfare. Thereby hangs a five-year tale behind "Paris Blues," opening Tuesday at the Astor and Fine Arts Theatres.

Blueprints

While abroad on a magazine

assignment, the idea occurred to Shaw for a movie in which Paris and its jazz life would be "characters" and not mere background for a story. He began to make sketches of Left Bank streets and scenes, with blanks for where actors would be positioned. Having studied art with, among others, Max Weber, his water colors were quite elaborate.

"The combination of artistry on canvas and reporting with the camera has always fascinated me," Shaw said. "Whenever I've been on assignment taking pictures, I've always tried to visit all the museums and galleries in the vicinity. Gjon Mili taught me a lot about how to use the camera. But I was less interested in mechanics than aesthetics because I hated to be dominated by the equipment. It can give a false picture of reality. I think the greatest 'photographer' of all time is Charlie Chaplin—he violated all the formal academic principles of photography in his scenes."

The movie was still a gleam

the story out figured it was both tough and controversial. Shaw kept working on its details, extracting "if and when" promises from various actors and other creative personnel. His faith in the project was contagious. If anyone met Shaw in the street in the last few years and asked him, "How's the picture coming?", both knew which one they were

talking about.

Arthur Krim and Max Youngstein of United Artists encouraged Shaw to keep working on putting the elements together. Sidney Poitier agreed to play a leading role. Ellington was committed to do the score, and soon Louis Armstrong wanted in. The director, Martin Ritt, saw the story's potentials. Paul Newman, Joanne Woodward and Diahann Carroll promised to clear the decks. Now corporate tables of organization were set up—Diane Productions, a New York independent formed by Shaw and Ian Woodner, art collector and builder, operating under Pennebaker Productions (the Marlon Brando company whose executive producers are George Glass and Walter Seitzer), operating under financial and distributing auspices of United Artists.

All that was needed now was a shooting script, and the trick was turned by Irene Kamp, with additional screen writing credit going to Walter Bernstein and Jack Sher.

ture was finally filmed in Paris. It had grown from a \$400,000-budget to a \$2,000,000-budget film. At dinner one evening in a Left Bank restaurant, Ellington and Shaw sat around, wondering if their original concept of the story had been lost in largeness.

Then Shaw told Ellington that that afternoon they had shot a scene along the Seine in which Diahann Carroll had asked Sidney Poitier why he preferred to work in Paris. Poitier replied, "Here in Paris I'm Eddie Cook, musician—period; not Eddie Cook, Negro musician." When the Duke heard that, he was satisfied that the basic aims of "Paris Blues" were still on target.

In the meantime, until "Paris Blues" opens, Sam Shaw—or Sam Shaw—has been on the road again, shooting other people's pictures.